

**Peter Sulzer**

Peter Sulzer (1917–2009) was an Africanist and founder of the Africana Collection at the Winterthur City Library, Winterthur, Switzerland.

**Arthur Fula****Arthur Fula**

This is a translation of a chapter entitled “Arthur Fula” from Peter Sulzer’s unpublished manuscript *Südafrika im Spiegel der Afrikaans Literatur* (1965), pages 381–91. This Swiss librarian and Africanist corresponded for at least eight years with Fula and met him in the early 1960s at his place of work, the Johannesburg Magistrate’s courts. Fula, a native Xhosa speaker, worked as an interpreter where he also interpreted from Zulu and Sesotho. He published the novels *Jôhannie giet die beeld* (1954, Johannesburg casts the graven image; *The Golden Magnet*, 1984) and *Met erbarming, O Here* (1957, With Compassion, Oh Lord). In this chapter Sulzer provides valuable information on several of Fula’s unpublished works of which none has survived. This includes the unpublished novel *’n Zoeloe-dogter* (A Zulu Daughter), two novellas “Vader Kalashe” (Pastor Kalashe) and “Matsiliso van Phomolong” (Matsiliso of Phomolong), and several poems. Fula’s prose writing often explored the tensions between tradition and modernity. Sulzer’s view argued in this chapter is that the author’s poetry is “of greater literary value than the novellas”. Sulzer’s unpublished chapter provides valuable background and literary commentary on a writer who has largely been forgotten. **Keywords:** Arthur Fula, Afrikaans literature, African traditions, modernity.

In many of his letters that Arthur Fula wrote to me over a period of eight years, he added the designation “the African author” to his signature.<sup>1</sup> Fula had a big, scrawling handwriting; he wrote everything by hand because he had no typewriter. And so it costs the reader no small effort to work through those lines. As for spelling and punctuation—Fula had his own source of inspiration. It was obvious that his letters and manuscripts were never written in an organised and well-kept study, for they had been through many a visible exertion before reaching the post-box. Many were the schoolmasters whose fingers started itching when they read his scripts. However, these external shortcomings of the manuscripts did in no way deter me from transcribing and publishing them. The only problem was that I had to transcribe each and every page myself. And that on a typewriter, which I had forgotten in the bus on my first visit to Johannesburg and which I happily collected a few days later at the local lost property office—as if this calamity had not happened to me in the “golden labyrinth”<sup>2</sup>—this was the title under which Fula’s first novel *Jôhannie giet die beeld* (Johannesburg casts the graven image)<sup>3</sup> was published—but somewhere in the far North. The director of the Public Library to whom I had turned in my first need, remembered the incident although eight years had passed.

She assisted me again, this time to find manuscripts and writers, rather than books and typewriters. She arranged for me to meet with the chief of the Non-European Library, and it so happened that a number of black librarians and writers were having a meeting with him. Hence I could submit my proposal to professional ears, immediately as it were. While I did not hear from them, my African colleagues again, the meeting itself was of significance because one of the colleagues showed me the way to the court where non-European criminals are sentenced. After straying through a veritable labyrinth of stairs, floors, corridors and foyers I eventually landed up in the courtroom. A Sotho-speaking thief was standing trial and the court interpreter, who translated the statements of the accused and the judge into English, was none other than Arthur Fula. During the break I greeted the author of "Golden Labyrinths" in the corridor. Fula was clearly surprised and delighted that I had come to South Africa unannounced, as we had had only written communication in the past. He promised to send me manuscripts and did so promptly. He looked as if he had worked himself into the ground and his clothes were rather shabby, but his eyes appeared to be full of life. He kept offering me his large and limp hand in farewell. How often might Fula have shaken the hand of a white person in public? I was thankful that he received me in such a friendly manner.

As far as I know Fula is the only black South African writer that writes in Afrikaans. All other Bantu write in English or in one of the indigenous languages. In this sense he can rightfully add the designation "the African author" to his signature, even though it does cause one to smile. Fula's literary production is quite modest if compared with the standing of the *oeuvre* of Thomas Mofolo, B. W. Vilakazi or H. I. E. Dhlomo. However, Fula's works reveal a sincere effort to promote education and a strong determination to strive for the good. This has to be recognised.

*Im goldenen Labyrinth* (Stuttgart, 1956) is a typical "Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg" novel. Two young African men leave their village in Mozambique for Johannesburg to work as mineworkers, but get caught up in the machinations of a gangster. One of the young men is good. He frees himself from the clutches of the gangster and becomes an evangelist. The second young man falls prey to the dishonest acquisition of money and lands in gaol. An edifying story, something that one could teach in Sunday school, in a sense. Fula is an unpretentious storyteller who offers his people a service in his own way. For Fula life is not about the decision for or against white "imperialists", but simply about the difference between "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "evil".

The unpublished novel *A Zulu Daughter* deals with a different main theme of black African contemporary literature, namely, the relationship of the African towards civilisation and tribal traditions. The daughter of a traditional healer is in love with a student. Their love flounders because of the antithesis between heathen traditions and Christian civilisation. The father of the young man is against his son marrying "an uneducated, naked heathen". The head of the school for customary education as

well as the sisters of the young woman are opposed to the love relationship which they regard as an offence against traditional customs and practices. Sibusisiwe initially turns to traditional potions from her father's traditional medicines room to gain the affection of her lover. She then converts to Christianity. Her young man, Velile, however, follows the advice of his parents and marries an educated woman. But even the Zulu girl turns towards education and marries a medical doctor who decides to study herbal medicine after completing his medical studies.

In contrast to most of the Bantu authors of South Africa Fula does not create a divide between tribal traditions and civilisation. Although Fula is an educated man, he does not deny the power of magic. The magic of the Zulu girl is effective; and the traditional herbal medicine maintains its full validity alongside European medicine. With regard to the dilemma *civilisation* or *tribal tradition* Fula is akin to West African writers: Camara Laye, Onuora Nzekwu, Chinua Achebe, they all accomplish a union of the old and the new Africa—as is the case of *A Zulu Daughter*. Except that in the case of Fula it is essentially always a discourse between *good* and *evil*, between God's heroic struggle with Satan, now in the figure of the evil sorcerer, now as the urban criminal. The figures can signify either the old or the new Africa. Not the old, evil Africa against the new, good Africa is the imperative, but rather a union of the good of old Africa with the good of the new Africa, as everywhere else.

In the great sermon of Easter which constitutes the spiritual core of the novel *A Zulu Daughter*, Fula brings African fantasy, perception of battle and the rhetoric of the African palaver into play. Pastor Khuzwayo preaches:

"Dearly beloved in the Lord; my friends, brothers and sisters. Today, as you all know is Easter Sunday. It is the day that we celebrate in memory of our Lord, Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Hero of all Heroes, the King of Kings is risen after he had overcome Satan. [...] Because God, the Creator, created everything other than human beings, he called a great gathering. The princes and other noble persons of heaven wondered what God, the King and Creator of the universe would want to tell them and so they sat silently together, full of expectations. Then God said: "Come, let Us create human beings in Our image." The Most High climbed down from His throne and descended to earth. To the surprise of the heavenly ones He rolled up His sleeves and kneaded clay oxen like a boy.

God took clay and kneaded mankind with His own hands. He breathed His breath into the nostrils of the clay figures, and in this way the clay figure became a human being, became Adam. [...] However, even while everything was in one accord with God, with the Creator, the seed of sin started sprouting. Whence, my friends, o whence did sin come from? Was the human being responsible for the advent of sin? No, my friends, absolutely not! [...] Even as the whole of Creation worshipped and praised God, there was a noble prince who, out of sheer egoism and ambition, found no reason to fall prostrate before God and to thank Him. He was envious of the Almighty's standing.

The wicked spirit of rebellion filled his breast to such a degree that it flowed out of him and contaminated some of the other heavenly beings. Prayer, praise and thanksgiving stopped abruptly as both sides sharpened spears and armed themselves with shields. Michael, the great heavenly prince, whom we now know as our Lord Jesus, positioned himself at the head of God's heavenly hosts while the ambitious prince, whom we call Satan, was the commander-in-chief of his own troops. After a furious battle Satan was thrust down to earth and, instead of begging God's forgiveness Satan decided that as a measure of revenge he would lead the human beings astray, so that God would have no more pleasure in the work of His hands. [...]

After human beings fell prey to sin and death, God the Creator once again convened a great meeting. This time around it was about how to save the human beings, so that, according to the plan of Creation, they could attain eternal life. There was a tense hush amongst the hosts of heavenly princes and noblemen as the conditions and terrifyingly great demands were communicated about the ransom to be paid for freeing mankind from their sins. It was our good fortune that the heroic Michael announced that he would take the sacrifice for mankind upon himself. [...]

Immediately after this, another meeting took place; this time in hell under the chairmanship of Satan. Satan had such a pretty face that no one would have believed hatred, envy, jealous and the most terrible evil resided in his breast. Satan rose from his chair and said that he had recently attended a heavenly meeting—oh yes, even Satan dropped in occasionally in heaven—and that he understood that Prince Michael would be descending to earth to redeem mankind from sin. "Needless to say, hard times will be upon us, so that we will have to work harder in the future. Therefore I want each one of you to come forward and offer me advice." One of the princes said: "O King and noble princes, in my opinion we should tell the human beings that God does not exist and that everything that is recorded in the Holy Scripture is merely a fabrication. Human beings should do as they please because only sin is of substance. Satan replied smilingly: "Man has too much intelligence these days to be so easily deceived. He is highly developed and will therefore ponder over the difference between good and evil." [...] Another demon stood up and advised: "How about us begging the Almighty for forgiveness; for even though we have sinned, we still remain His children...." That was enough for Satan. He jumped up from his chair and pronounced: "Whoever throws away spear and shield, who offers no resistance, will be the laughing stock of the entire universe. Even mankind will scorn us!" [...] Then from the back of the gathering of the despised lower nobility a tiny whimpering voice was heard: "I have an idea." Everyone turned around to see who was speaking. "Well then, speak up!" said Satan mockingly. With that the wicked little spirit answered: "Kings. Noble Princes. If we want to deceive mankind, we need to declare that God does indeed exist. They should serve Him and worship Him because He is their Creator. Everything that the pastor preaches is true. One should listen to them. [...] But then we set them

a trap. When we approach a young person, we should say: "Look here; there is still so much time because life is long. You should commit yourself to a church, certainly, but do so next year. There are just so many things in life for you to enjoy. We say the same to the older people, except that we advise them to worship God the next day. Hence we recommend postponement to them. And when a person is about to die, before the dying person even realises what's happening—then, hey presto!—we pounce. In that way we will extend our kingdom and make progress." "Step forward, noble Prince!" shouted Satan with joy. "Your suggestion is the best. In future we will go that way...." (*Afrika Heute* 286ff)

Also in the two novellas "Pastor Kalashe" and "Matsiliso of Phomolong" do tribal rituals and the debate between sorcery on the one hand and civilisation and Christianity on the other hand play a role. In addition, tribal oral tradition is alive in the form of proverbs and sayings which Fula skilfully weaves into his prose. Nonetheless, the organising principle is once again the battle between good and evil.

Of greater literary value than the novellas is, in my opinion, Fula's poetry, a naïve composition of free verse and praise poetry. The lyrical impulse is confined almost entirely to fulfilling the purpose of poetry—whether it is the invocation and praise poetry of the individual or the songs and hymns of a community. Lyric poetry always allows the poet to work himself into the poetic mood and to be thus invigorated and able to assert himself. Occasionally rhyme appears, occasionally language is rendered rhythmic, but on the whole the text remains pure prose.

Thematically, Fula's lyric is a repetition of the question of the new Africa versus the old Africa as dealt with in his prose texts: *sorcery* and *science* are woven into the text side by side. In "Ulindipisi" (The Rinderpest) for example, Fula demonstrates that the sorcerer was quite right in maintaining that the 'enemy', the rinderpest, was something that he saw flying. And indeed, it was herons that spread the rinderpest: sorcery and science coincide with each other in their respective assertions.

The little evil water sprite, the *tokoloshe*, makes his appearance: "Late in the afternoon when the showers stop, or at twilight just before sunset I mingle with the children and play with them. I do not harm them, because their hearts are pure." For both the biblical texts about Satan and the indigenous water sprite the level of reality is exactly the same. Once again, as in *A Zulu Daughter* and "Pastor Kalashe" we have the *juxtaposition* of compelling sorcery and the Christian thought.

The struggle of African Christians against Satan is like necromancy that takes place at night:

The mothers of Africa  
How graceful is the procession to the omnibus!  
Picturesque the women in their black gowns and leopard skin hats;  
Their destination is Van Wyk's Rest.

The bus is packed;  
The wheels are rolling,  
A hymn resounds:  
"The Lord God lives..."  
A single singing multitude.

It is still early evening.  
They have arrived,  
Visiting the sick first,  
Singing as they march forward.  
With distinct contours and lonely  
The little grass church stands there;  
The trees a silhouette  
In the hazy distance  
Surrounds everything of the silent *Veld*  
In the light of the bright moon.

Throughout the night they deliberate,  
Praying, singing, confessing their faith.  
Broken souls are healed.  
Sworn in in the battle against Satan.  
Thus will the Lord reveal everything to them,  
To them, the mothers of Africa.  
(Manuscript 13)

A strong seemingly 'un-African' determination to do good is found in numerous expressions of Fula. With the refrain "hope does not do any harm" (*iTemba alidanisi*), Fula throws down the gauntlet at the trials and tribulations of life (Manuscript 10, see Sulzer, *Südafrikaner erzählen*). And in his little philosophical poem "Buntjalo u bomi" (Such is life) he calls for the courage to act resolutely at the crossroads of life:

The will to act, full confidence in the deed  
And in the belief  
That the deed will be accomplished.  
(Manuscript 11)

Arthur Fula's ardent *ethos* springs forth on the one hand from the difficult experiences of an urban African in the struggle of existence, and on the other hand from his simple belief in the Bible, the heritage of the white Afrikaner. Fula probably knows the *Bible* less well than the Cape Coloured Small, Petersen and Philander. However, when he does include the Bible in his work, he does so free from irony and cynicism,

in contrast to the *Kleurlingen*. Without being a revolutionary, he quite naively draws *social revolutionary* consequences from the words of the Bible:

**Our daily bread (*Isonka se mihla nge mihla*)**

Feebly the candle flickers in the little room.  
Everything awaits the blessing.  
There he comes, the envoy of the Lord,  
The young *predikant* is doing home visits.

Give us this day our daily bread,  
Without which we shall starve.  
His words are potent but also solemn.

Both, God and the devil are spirits,  
That is what the Holy Bible shows us  
In the good deeds the Lord is manifested.  
His angels, the messengers from above give bread.

In the appearance of the godless, Satan shows himself as he is:  
He is the sadist  
A descendant of Hades.  
He robs bread from out of the mouths of children.  
He exploits.  
It is no sin  
To root out the likes of him.  
They are the source  
Of all want.  
(Manuscript 6)

Totally ingenuously the poet shows the way which, if consistently followed, must lead to the religiously motivated violent uprisings of the example of a Thomas Münzer and other “religious zealots” during era of the Reformation.

Yet not only his belief in the Bible and the accompanying Old Testament interpretation appears to be influenced by White Africa; also the *understanding of death*. Hence when Fula writes:

Without shame Death is cruel  
Tearing the little one from its mother’s breast.  
(Manuscript 6)

Other White African elements in his worldview are the desire of the urban dweller for the traditional land and linking the notion of the city with moral decay, seduc-

tion and disappointment. The tragic figure of urbanisation: the mineworker who becomes a scoundrel while the mother in the Reserve lives in the hope of his return; the girl that absconds with a *tsotsi* [hoodlum] only to return to the mother filled with deferred remorse; convicts, whether falsely accused of being *bandiete* or not, who yearn for freedom (see “Die jong mynwerker”, The young mineworker); “Deuntjie”, Ditty) and “Die Bantoe prisonierslied”, The Bantu prisoner’s song), Manuscript 4, 10, 6; Sulzer, *Südafrikaner Erzählen* 75).<sup>4</sup> Especially Egoli, the City of Gold, is considered to be the very epitome of iniquity, a *veritable Babel*:

[...] but the ogre of fear  
Is the lord that rules there.  
Unsafe by day,  
A fortress of trials in the night;  
The just one enjoys no peace,  
Always on guard:  
Johannesburg, restless city  
With your mixture of people.  
(Manuscript 11)

And in contrast to the destructive city life there is the praise poem to the land, to the richness of the land. In order to grasp Fula’s standpoint one can place the dialogue from the poem “The mielie vans at the location” next to the famous image of the ruined Reserve created by Allan Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*:

[...] the *Plattelander* speaks to the city dweller:  
“Sir, here in the city you are a hero,  
Laden with money, as you are.”  
The city dweller stares at him, amazed.  
The *Plattelander* is astonished,  
As the friend contradicts:  
“The roaring of your cattle,  
The bleating of your livestock  
Sound in your ears.”  
And me? What lies on my pathway?  
I am a drunkard, nothing more!  
(Manuscript 9)

Maybe Fula intentionally wheedles up to the white African when he enthuses about the traditions of the tribal lands and gushes over the beer revelries, sorcery and *lobola* and, although he is an urban African, praises cattle like a Dinka priest—“without cattle I am nothing”—making it seem as if in South Africa today people still engage in battle for the ownership of cattle herds (see “Tiwala”, Manuscript 7; “Christ...” 32)



When the battle horn sounds from mountain to mountain,  
When heroes assemble to do battle,  
Then each and everyone know: cattle are at stake...  
("Beeste", Cattle; Manuscript 10)

Is this romanticism of the urban Negro's "back to nature" or music for the ears of theorists of the "primitive Natives"? Whatever it may be: if Fula really wants to wheedle up to the white *Baas* it should not become his pitfall. One should not forget that today there are more Whites who want to wheedle up to Blacks, than the other way around!

Arthur Fula's romanticism regarding traditional land is expressed with greater conviction than his fanciful enthusiasm for the unspoilt Native, as is the case in the song of praise to a Sotho girl,

**Matsiliso (Little consoler)**

When the snow-covered slopes of the Maluti mountains  
Dispatch their wind-borne tidings to the north,  
I ponder on Lesotho, where people  
In precious ornamental blankets of colour  
Populate the fields as if flowers.

Where are you, Matsiliso  
Where your broad charmingly sweet smile?  
Teeth like little pebbles,  
Washed snow white with the cool waters  
From the crystal clear fast flowing streams  
That springs from their source high in the mountains.

My heart is being consumed by the worm of loneliness  
My consolation: your promise.  
When the *Tsikitlanne* blooms  
And the arum lily  
When the wind blows fresh from the mountain,  
When the cattle low and the calves show off  
After the first rains  
You will return to me  
O Matsiliso,  
To our mad, restless city  
With its gold-grinding mills,  
Back to Johannesburg.  
(Manuscript 10)

This is exactly where one sees that the city is the true home of the poet. Here we have a reverse romanticism, a *romanticism of the city* as it were. And despite the opponents of South Africa who wrongly belittle the Locations—we even have a romanticism of the Locations: homesick for Johannesburg:

*Ndikumbula ekaya* (Homesick)

My body sojourns in foreign climes,  
My heart up in the distant Highveld.  
I yearn for the clean air of the open plateau.  
I hanker after the sound of my own language  
And the brackish water of the Vaal.  
How I would love to stroll  
In the streets of Johannesburg—  
Up President Street, down Eloff Street—  
At Jan Smuts Airport someone is waiting for me  
Day after day, as the Boeings land,  
She looks searchingly whether I am arriving.  
With tears in her eyes she stares ahead.  
Her courage is broken. Intimidated her looks.  
I travel back to her,  
To console her little heart.  
(Manuscript 17)

Or the love for Atteridgeville, a Bantu suburb of Pretoria.

[...]  
broad are your streets, pretty your little houses,  
As pretty as the girls who live in you.  
Pious are your people, your children polite.  
Good is the manner in which they live.  
Like milk that flows out of a brimful udder,  
Such is your friendliness, o Atteridgeville;

Always would I want to suckle  
The teats of your uprightness.  
Towards sunset  
The busses spread  
A reddish mist.  
It brings about a feeling of homeliness  
And rest...  
(Manuscript 3)<sup>5</sup>

The cloud of dust caused by the bus is akin to the cloud of dust that is whipped up by the feet of the dancers who walk to the native village. This is how this image in the poem about Atteridgeville is to be interpreted.

In the same manner as Fula juxtaposes medicine and sorcery, or the belief in ghosts and in the Bible, he also treats the relationship between city and tribal lands as two opposite but equal worlds.

In his poetry, as is evident in the poem "Teats of Atteridgeville", Fula gives preference to powerful images, and to a language that draws its sustenance from the epigrammatic sayings and the peasant traditions of the Bantu.

Fula passes on the tradition of African praise poetry. Except that he does not praise the chiefs but the towns, rivers, places of habitation, flowers, animals, stars, natural phenomena and the seasons. In this way, by incorporating his observations into the praise poetry, he unites ancient lyrical forms with an oftentimes quite *didactic naturalism*.

***Inyibiba (The arum lily)***

Arum lily!

O blossom of our land,

Drinking cup of the priests of old,

Splendid as the paintings of the old masters,

Reproached by many as a "pig lily"

Yet your beauty satisfies the eye.

Named *Richardia Africana* by the erudite:

You are found nowhere but in Africa...

("Inyibiba (Die aronslelie)", Manuscript 3)

As a city dweller Fula has an appreciation for the artistry of the African people and landscape, for colours and moods, an eye of the artist which may well be influenced by the Cape Dutch heritage.

**The willows by the lakeside**

How beautiful are the willows by the lakeside.

Delicately the darkness of the bark

Is contrasted with the green couch grass.

A pleasant breeze sways the boughs to and fro.

Gently caressing it makes up for the heat of the day.

Pleasantly the turtle doves coo in the trees.

People enjoy the shade.

Someone cheerfully laughs loudly

While others talk about love.

Silently the boats sail by

Over the glittering waves.

Picturesque are the scenes  
In the evening light.  
("Die wilgers langs die meer", Manuscript 14)

(Compare "Die reënboog", The rainbow; "Matshona langa e naledi (kort voor skemer die naledi", Just before dusk the morning star; "Die mimosa op Merafe", The mimosas on Merafe", Manuscript 14, 17).

The content, though not the form and style, could almost be the landscape idyll of W. E. G. Louw or Elisabeth Eybers. But we encounter the Cape Dutch feel for colour in the poems such in the cameo "The Xhosa Maiden", in which the presence of Black Africa predominates:

Everywhere in the Transkei  
Everywhere in that grassy fertile land  
The heavens are bright and blue.  
Snow-white clouds  
Over the radiant green plain,  
As far as the eye can see.

The Xhosa maiden cherishes the listless idle hours<sup>6</sup>  
She ponders forgotten beautiful days.  
And places hope on approaching happiness.  
Money for *lobola* her loved one is earning  
Faraway in the gold mines of Transvaal.  
("Die Xosa-nooi", The Xhosa Maiden; Manuscript 7)

Fula uses naturalism for the portrayal of characters that mirror the current societal situation of the African city: the image of the mineworker, the coffee-cart girl, the dancing and whistling men who ply their trade on street corners. All this makes up the local flavour that Fula creates.

How differently the self-same subject can be treated by a white African and a black using the same language is best shown the comparison of two poems about the bat, one by Uys Krige and the other by Arthur Fula.

#### **Die vlermuis**

Daar's net een dier op aarde wat my hinder.  
En ek sal jou dit sê, vriend, sonder om te skinder.  
Dis die nag se wrede spotprent van 'n vlinder.

Hy draai, hy swaai. Hy's hier, hy's daar ... hy nêrens tuis.  
Hy het geen koers of doel, lyk dit, vlieg dwars, vlieg kruis.  
Kry hy nooit rus, die vlerre-, vlerre-, vlerremuis?

[...]

Jy hoor iets soos 'n strykstok skraap sonder harpuis.  
Iets vat-vat aan jou wang koud soos 'n dooie man se vuus.  
Die sekeltjie van sy swart vlerke, suis

vlak by jou oor verby. Jy kry die hoendervlees  
tot in jou nek. Jy ril, jy skrik. Wat kan dit wees?  
Hy's weg, hy's deel weer van die nag se skaduwees.

Jy weet net dit: hy's swart, pikswart of hy beswadder  
is van die nag se roet, swart as die nagadder  
wat wriemel deur die slyk ... en hy fladder, fladder, faldder.

[...]

(Krige 47)<sup>7</sup>

And Fula's "The bat"

**Ilulwane (The bat)**

Bat!

Bat, what are you?

Are you a bird?

Are you a mouse?

Or indeed both?

Just like the owl you hunt by night,

Swift and lithe in your flight

Through the darkness

"Chirr-chirr" you quietly call

When you catch moths and gnats in the darkness.

You are neither a small nor big friend.

Surrounded by suspicion,

That you tear out hair,

To build your nest in dark caves.

Like the owl you have a bad name,

Bearer of ill omens,

As the lackey of the sorcerer you are known.

(Manuscript 14)

In Krige's poem his experiences of the bat take place in the purely psychological realm. The poet recognises in the bat his own restlessness. The creepiness that it evokes bears a direct relationship to the night and to what the night signifies, namely death. Fula, on the other hand, does not seek recourse in psychology. His poem is purely descriptive; moreover it offers a view into the reality of sorcery that surrounds the bat. For Fula sorcery is a reality that has either to be explained or feared and hence to be combatted.

It is very seldom that one finds melancholy or pessimism in Fula's hymns. One time he does allow the "Ixhego" (The Old Man) to say:

Should I sing of Chiefs?  
Should I muse upon warriors?  
Should I praise my herds?  
Should I speak of grazing fields?  
Of the days of my youth  
When the world was still young?  
When the Lord still blessed the earth with rain?  
My old eyes saw all this.  
This is what my aged mouth can tell.

Of that which I see now, I will not tell,  
Nor is there anything that pleases my soul,  
Where everything, also the virtues  
In the dusky dark of the world  
As sure as sunset, is rendered blurred.  
(Manuscript 4)

However such reflection of that which is lost is in the final analysis once more a romanticism of the tribal land, this time within the dimension of time. A romanticism of "yes, in the days of old..."

By virtue of his *assenting* and courageous attitude towards life, Fula differs distinctly from frustrated black South African *émigrés* who tend towards depression—the intellectuals who lament "death in the midst of life", and "neither living nor dying". Fula's positive attitude stands most clearly in contrast to the *Kleurling* poets who are banished into the downward spiral of discontent. Fula's poetry, narratives and novels proclaim the ability and possibility to live a contented and fulfilled life in South Africa; they bear witness to the vigour to be enthusiastic and a *humour* that helps to overcome one's own frailty.

One can be content in both the rural countryside and the city:

#### **The two sons**

Bantu son of rural parents,  
What do you possess?

O inquisitive stranger from a faraway land,  
Place yourself in the evening hour on our farm,  
Then you will see what I have inherited.  
Bleating and lowing my riches gather in the kraal.

Bantu son of urban parents,  
What do you possess?  
O inquisitive stranger from a faraway land,  
Look at our clothes!  
Our money is in the bank.  
Listen to our car humming.  
These are the treasures that we possess.  
("Die twee seuns", Manuscript 3)

Arthur Fula extracts the best from every situation:

When the cold makes our fingers crooked,  
Your smile makes little wrinkles around your mouth,  
Mamkwena, our coffee-cart treasure,  
Stands in a white apron at her place  
("Koffie-karretjie-nooi", Coffee-cart girl; Manuscript 4)

He raises the defeated by tapping him on the shoulder in a convivial manner. A rural young man loses his girlfriend to the city with its money when she is discovered by a photographer who makes her a cover girl. He feels like a small, robbed baboon that is laughed at by the mocking-bird: "Chiki-chiki, chiki-chiki":

All right then, maybe in a few years' time,  
Onto the broad course of your life,  
Your little tears will flow,  
Chiki-chiki, chicki-ckiki,  
It may be or it may be not,  
Dry away your tears, you stupid creature!  
("Bantoe-dekblaai-nooi", Bantu cover girl; Manuscript 4)

On another occasion he mocks at the unrequited lover:

**The Baca girl**

Girl on the banks of the Umzimkulu,  
Who drinks the water of the river,  
How I wonder what you think.  
How fine is your face  
In spite of the scars on your face,

The markings of your tribe.  
 And although I beseech you  
 That you love me,  
 I fear the might of your family.  
 Their sorcery is powerful  
 Their magic charms will drain me;  
 Like an ox that has been bitten by a snake I will perish.  
 I flee, a mere sigh.  
 Flee, you coward,  
 You likely are wanting of mettle.  
 ("Die Baca-nooi", Manuscript 11)

Fula does not allow any feelings of inferiority to surface. When he pays tribute to the beer revelries of the Bantu he proudly states: "Our way of life is healthy..." and it is precisely here that this poet reveals himself as a true African. For beer revelries signify community and *community* is the "milk of life", and, in contrast to the white African on the isolated farm and the Coloured individualists in the city, he will not break with custom. When *ubulolo*, the loneliness of living in the city, torments, he consoles himself that,

Somewhere in Africa too  
 Pounding hearts  
 Are consumed by  
 The worm of loneliness.  
 Do as the quagga does;  
 Trot in the happy community  
 Through sweet meadows,  
 Across broad open plains,  
 While a gentle caressing breeze  
 The tidings about friend or foe  
 About your nostrils bear.  
 ("Eensaamheid", Loneliness, Manuscript 11)

Arthur Fula enthuses about the whole of South Africa: about the richness of the tribal lands—whether real or romantically imaged from Johannesburg—also eThekweni, the city and holiday paradise Durban, the town of Potchefstroom or the native location of Phomolong. He intensifies his enthusiasm, thus strengthening his spirit of resilience—Come with me today to Phomolong! ("Op Phomolong", At Phomolong):<sup>8</sup>

We are welcome there in Marabi Hotel  
 In Phomolong, where tranquillity,  
 Joy, and godliness take up lodging,  
 Rest.



Phomolong!  
Phomolong!  
My heart longs  
For our small town Phomolong.

The silver moon drifts  
Across steel grey cloud.  
Stars peep bashfully forth,  
The pink colours fade on the horizon.  
I rejoice,  
As in Phomolong I am at home'  
In Phomolong!  
In Phomolong!  
My heart is longing  
For our little town Phomolong.

Full of optimism Fula sees in the colours of the arum lily the symbols of *South Africa*:

[...] the white of my crown:  
Purity.  
The yellow of my pistil:  
Wealth.  
The green of the stem and leaves:  
Well-being!

Is it indeed like this  
O flower of our land?  
If so, then it is well with our land!  
O flower of our land!  
O flower of our land!  
("Inyibiba (Die aronslelie)", Manuscript 3)

Because in the depths of his being Fula remains an optimist and experiences life as fulfilling and satisfactory, his poetry does not show the path away from South Africa, but the path back to South Africa, unlike those of other non-European writers. Thomas Mofolo describes in *Moeti oa bochabela* the pilgrimage of the young black herdsman to the distant land of the Christians. E. Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue* and Alfred Hutchinson in the *Road to Ghana* portray the act of turning away from the land of Apartheid. By contrast Arthur Fula composes the poem about the flight of the one who broke loose, the African eagle who escapes from his captivity in the bright north and returns to his distant African home:

Come with me, my dear one!  
Come with me, my dear one!  
We are leaving behind us the grey, cloudy lands of mist:

Come, let us fly across the sea,  
To where, my dear one, the heavens are a bright blue,  
Where the mountain brooks swell  
Into rapid streams.

Let us fly across the green, wide plains of the Free State,  
Then across the Great Karoo.  
There, my dear one, lies our golden, good, sunny land,  
Where the *suikerbos* protea grows,<sup>9</sup>  
And the arum lily blooms.  
("Kom na Suid-Afrika", Come to South Africa; Manuscript 1; compare "Der Flug der afrikanische Adlers", *Südafrikaner erzählen* 78f).

The love for South Africa creates a strong bond between the white and the black Africans with a national disposition.

Translated from the original German by Ethel Kriger, April 2016.

#### Endnotes

1. This is a chapter entitled "Arthur Fula" from Peter Sulzer's unpublished manuscript *Südafrika im Spiegel der Afrikaans Literatur* (1965), pages 381–91. The copy of the chapter was obtained by Barend Toerien who passed it on to Hein Willemse who in turn made it available for translation. Racial designations and social references have not been updated or redacted and reflect the perceptions and usage of the 1960s. This and subsequent notes are the translator's unless stated otherwise.
2. Sulzer refers to Emil Schwab's German translation of *Johannie giet die beeld, Im goldenen Labyrinth*, published in Basel and Stuttgart in 1956.
3. The Afrikaans title references Isaiah 40: 19, hence my translation of *beeld* into "graven image".
4. A *bandiet* is a convict who serves his prison sentence by working as a farm labourer or in public works. (Original note).
5. Didactically also *Inja* (The Dog, see Manuscript 4). (Original note).
6. The original line "Träger Musse pflegt das Xosamädchen" may in part have been mistyped.
7. Krige's "The bat": There is one critter on earth that troubles me. / And I tell you that, friend, its no gossip. / It's the night's cruel caricature of a butterfly. // He turns, he flips. He's here, he's there ... he's nowhere home. / He has no route or cause, it seems, flying to, flying fro. / Does he get any peace, the batty, batty, bat? // [...] // You hear something scratchy like a bow without rosin. / Something nudges your cheek like a dead man's fist. / The little sickle of his black wings, suddenly whistling // past your ear. You feel the cold chills / slithering down your spine. / You shudder, you startle. What can it be? / He vanishes, back into the night shadows. // You know only this: he's black, pitch black or blackened / by the soot of the night, black as a night adder / wrigling through the slime ... and he flutters, flutters, flutters. / [...] (Translated by Hein Willemse).
8. Phomolong is "place of rest" in Sesotho; it is also the name of a housing estate in Johannesburg. (Original note).
9. The *suikerbos* refers to the Cape Protea. (Original note).

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